

# Guess who's coming to dinner? Dublin eats up meal-sharing site

**Dara Flynn**

AN ONLINE meal-sharing service that links amateur local cooks with guests now has almost 20 hosts in Dublin offering a range of food experiences, from a €5 crash-course in making Spanish tortillas in Rathgar, to a €20 “meat feast” cooked by a former MasterChef Ireland contestant in his Cabra home.

The company, VizEat, uses the same “peer-to-peer” model as other sharing services such as Airbnb and Uber. Customers can book a paid-for meal via vizeat.com at the house of a stranger.

“Food and travel are very much linked,” said Camille Rumani, who co-founded the company in Paris in 2014. “VizEat is as much about meeting new people and learning about other cultures as it is about food.

“It’s still new to Ireland, but we expect it to do well here, as there’s a strong tradition of hospitality towards strangers in Irish culture and the philosophy



**VizEat, which started in Paris, has nearly 20 Dublin members**

of getting together around a table is strong.”

Last year, the company raised capital investment of €1m, helping it grow from 50 hosts to 10,000 hosts and 50,000 members in more than 60 countries. According to Rumani, the number of meals on offer is growing by 50% a month, it employs 18 people at its Paris base, and the website is available in four languages.

A smartphone app will be launched in March.

Last year, VizEat became the European market leader when it acquired Cookening, a rival meal-sharing service. Globally, competitor EatWith is the market leader. It vets hosts for quality and many are professional chefs with day jobs in restaurants. As a result, some in the trade have accused EatWith of creating

an “underground restaurant scene” that is damaging their business.

By contrast, VizEat hosts are mainly amateurs. “You don’t have to be a chef,” said Rumani, 26. “Indeed, some hosts may be great at atmosphere and welcome, but don’t really know how to cook. In those cases, we suggest they host a wine-and-cheese evening, or take their guest on a tour of their local food market or to a cooking class. The crucial thing is to meet new people and discover a different culture.”

A business graduate, Rumani set up VizEat when she was 24 with Jean-Michel Petit, a former venture capitalist. “The dining table was the original social network,” she said. “When I travelled I was aware that in a city with millions of people, you might never get to meet any of them, never have those human experiences. VizEat enables that, over a meal.”

*There’s a stranger at my table, Sunday, page 12*

